

VZCZCXRO2961

PP RUEHAST RUEHFL RUEHLA RUEHMRE RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSK RUEHSR
DE RUEHC #9756 3451649
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P R 101642Z DEC 08
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 6522
INFO ORG FOR SECURITY CO OP IN EUR COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS STATE 129756

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OSCE](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: STATEMENT ON GEORGIA

¶1. Post is authorized to make the following statement at the December 11, 2008, meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna.

Begin Text:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States wishes to call attention to reports of ongoing violence in the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia, including the possible firing on December 5 of an anti-tank guided missile near the Georgian-administered village of Mereti, east of Tskhinvali. This was the second such incident in the region, occurring just weeks after a similar attack on November 21. In addition, EU and UNOMIG monitors are reporting almost daily incidents targeting Georgian police along the administrative boundary of the Georgian region of Abkhazia.

Both incidents provide evidence of Russia's continuing failure to guarantee the security of the areas under its control. Mr. Chairman, we are concerned incidents of this sort will exacerbate tensions in the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia and raise the potential for renewed violence.

The recent joint ODIHR/HCNM report on human rights in the war-affected areas of Georgia also indicate that serious human rights and humanitarian concerns remain in the zone of conflict. Problems of internally displaced persons, restrictions on movement across administrative boundaries, and widespread lawlessness will continue if not promptly addressed, and underscore the importance of gaining access for OSCE and EU monitors to the separatist regions.

We continue to believe OSCE and EU monitors must have unfettered access to the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia, in hopes they can help prevent further violent incidents and ensure the protection of local populations. Such access is also necessary to allow for a meaningful needs assessment by international experts to ensure all vulnerable populations receive the assistance they require.

Additionally, we believe the OSCE must help establish an incident response mechanism to deal with prior and ongoing violence and human rights abuses, and participate in a process to ensure the safe and voluntary return of internally displaced persons, as called for in the Geneva talks on Georgia. We look forward to constructive discussions on December 17 and 18, and hope this process will foster practical cooperation to stabilize the situation in Georgia and reduce tensions.

The United States will continue to support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and will help in all ways to further peaceful conflict resolution. Toward that end, we again call on Russia to implement in their entirety the commitments made in the August 12 and September 8 ceasefire agreements, in particular the return of Russian forces to their August 7 positions and the free movement of

humanitarian aid, international observers and return of displaced persons.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
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